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Women Of Nashville: A Magazine

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WOMEN OF NASHVILLE: A MAGAZINE

Bronte Lebo

A Senior Honors Thesis project submitted to the Honors Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

**Bachelor of Arts
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Bronte Lebo
Women of Nashville: A Magazine
Reflective Essay

Good journalism requires many skills, but one of the most important and underrated is the art of conversation. I learned this the hard way in my first year at Belmont, when I was a shy 18-year-old who found herself having panic attacks over the thought of calling strangers up on the phone to interview them. The writing part came naturally, but the willingness to sit down and talk to people with enough skill and ease to get them to open up to me? That only came with hours of practice and plenty of failures. And in the process, I realized that my role as a journalist and a writer, whatever form that takes, is the role of a storyteller. Some journalists live for drama and scandal or keeping people informed about the latest facts and figures, and I believe that work has great importance. But that's not where my passion lies. My best work comes out of conversation, from sitting with people long enough to hear the things they've maybe never had a chance to say before, and from putting those things down on paper in a way that moves people simply because it's so real and honest.

I spent most of my college career learning the rules of journalism — AP Style, inverted pyramid form, journalistic ethics, communication law and more — so when it came time to choose my thesis track, I decided to concentrate on the art form of storytelling, and I joined the Artist's Studio to learn how to better engage my own creativity. I was challenged to focus on finding my voice as a writer. Now that I knew what I wanted to say, it was time to turn my attention toward deciding how to say it most effectively. As I did this, I learned to infuse creativity and voice into my journalistic writing, using details I may have otherwise ignored to help tell my subjects' stories.

And when it came time to choose the focus for my senior thesis, it seemed only natural to turn to one of my biggest sources of inspiration throughout my collegiate career: The city of Nashville itself. I decided to create a magazine that would pay homage to Nashville, a place that buzzed with growth, creativity and diversity. To me, Nashville was a place where every person had a dream they were working hard to achieve, and with those dreams came great stories, many of which had never been told. I was captivated by the idea of showcasing some of those narratives as a way to exemplify all that I'd learned since moving to the city. More specifically, I decided to highlight the stories of some of Nashville's women, because I had been so inspired by their success and creativity, and I wanted to share that inspiration with a wider audience. I think on a subconscious level, I also believed that telling these women's stories would teach me to be more like them: cool, smart, creative and ambitious.

I decided to make a magazine because, in an increasingly digital world, I loved the idea of having one, concrete project that was completely made by me, something I could hold in my hands and give to other people as an embodiment of all I've learned in my four years of college. I knew the photography and design aspects of the project would challenge me, since I've always been better with words than with visuals and would have to teach myself an entirely new software (Adobe InDesign), but I've never been one to shy away from a good challenge, and I relished the idea of learning a few more skills that could serve me in my future career.

Up until the point when I started working on my thesis, every journalism project I had ever undertaken had had a relatively quick turnaround time. I've written hundreds of stories for the Belmont Vision and for my various internships, but the longest project I had ever worked on was the Vision's monthly news broadcast. So much of journalism is about getting a story done

and published as quickly as possible, and even though that brings its own set of challenges, I wasn't used to working on a project that would take months of planning and even longer to execute. Creating this magazine taught me how to plan content far in advance, and it pushed me to be disciplined and keep working even when my initial excitement and motivation for the project faded away.

On top of learning to how to use Adobe InDesign, creating the visual elements of the magazine also pushed me to learn about and focus on aesthetic principles like creating a color pallet, designing multiple unique but cohesive spreads and strategically placing photos throughout a story. I learned that print journalism has entirely different constraints compared to the mostly digital work I had done in the past. In online journalism, content drives the form, but in print journalism, form drives the content, but it still has to fit the message of the story you're telling. When you're publishing a story online, length is only constrained by how much you have to say. I've always been taught to make a story "as long as it needs to be," no longer, no shorter. Photos are included to keep a reader's interest, and you can add elements like video and links to other websites to help encourage viewer interaction. When making this magazine, I had to determine my wordcount based on the amount of space I had on a given page, and photos had to fit logically into the spreads I'd created. I also had to make sure my photos didn't clash with the color scheme of the whole magazine, which was something I'd never even considered when publishing my work digitally. This was a new and unexpected challenge, but it was one I enjoyed tackling. The project pushed me to further develop my writing, reporting and photography skills, which are all things I use on a daily basis in my career, so the whole process definitely helped prepare me for my post-graduation work.

Far beyond skills and processes, the biggest lesson this project taught me was about the remarkable adaptability and resilience of humanity. Two weeks before my project was supposed to be due, a tornado tore through Nashville. Several of the women featured in the magazine were affected, as their businesses were closed down or their neighborhoods were damaged. Most notably, Metro councilwoman Sharon Hurt, who has devoted her entire career to advocating for North Nashville and Jefferson Street, watched her community be especially devastated by this natural disaster, as homes and businesses were destroyed and entire neighborhoods were left without power for weeks. In the midst of this tragedy, I saw the Nashville community rally with a generosity unlike anything I'd ever seen before. People who had lost their own homes were donating to help others who were more in need. Restaurants that were closed raised huge amounts of money to continue paying their employees. Musicians across the city gathered to spread hope and fundraise for tornado relief. These stories did not make it into the magazine, because they were too close to the deadline and the people living them out were too busy making an impact to have time to talk about it, but the resilience I witnessed during that week inspired so much of the finishing touches I put on the project. About a week later, businesses started feeling the effects of COVID-19. Job losses, business closures and cancelled events are affecting everyone in the United States right now, and the women in my magazine are no exception. And in the midst of this unprecedented confusion, fear and loss, I've found hope once again in the women of Nashville. This time, though, it's not because they're ambitious, but because they're resilient. From the musicians providing hope with free livestream concerts, to the businessowners pivoting to keep their companies afloat, to the moms juggling working from home and caring for their kids full time, to the medical professionals working long hours to save lives, I'm inspired by the courage and determination of the women all around me. So even

though the chaos of the past month and a half created some logistical challenges for this project — namely, the fact that I can't print a physical copy until this ends, and the cancellation of my BURS presentation — I can think of no better time to honor Nashville's women, and I'm thankful I had the opportunity to tell some of their stories.